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Village Echoes

BY

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VILLAGE ECHOES

By Phoebe Elizabeth Emery

"ONE MORE DAY'S WORK FOR JESUS"

THE day is over and, like Abraham of old, I sit in my tent door enjoying the coolness of the evening. My two big white oxen tied to the wheel of the cart are contentedly munching their straw. The Bible woman, squatted on the ground in front of her tiny tent, is busily engaged in making *chapatties* (unleavened cakes) over a little fire of dried cow-dung. The acrid smoke curls up peacefully in the still evening air and, as she turns the cakes deftly from side to side, she chants aloud in a high-pitched tone of voice, *Gunagaharon ke bachane ko aya Masiha* (To save sinners, Christ came).

The ox-driver, seated apart in front of a still more diminutive tent, is also engaged in making *chapatties*. The ground around him has been freshly plastered with cow-dung and his tent is pitched at an exclusive distance that the contaminating shadow of the Christian may not fall upon his food; for he is a Hindoo and while a tolerant, good-natured fellow in most points, he can be changed in a moment into a fierce, iron-clad bigot if his caste is touched.

A faint afterglow lingers in the western sky, and a few baby stars have slipped out in their fleecy nighties of white clouds and peep down inquisitively at me through the overhanging branches of the mango trees. A white moon rides high in the sky and by the witchery of her magic transforms my common everyday world into a mysterious fairyland of light and shade. It is a beautiful night in which to be alive and, having just finished a juicy repast of savory goat stew which would bear a favorable comparison with the historic one concocted by Rebekah of old, I sit in my tent door in a musing frame and gaze out on the sights and scenes about me, for I, be it known, am an evangelistic missionary, one of those nomadic wanderers whose castle consists of four sloping walls of white canvas and whose grounds and gardens change with the changing moons.

My chariot and prancing steeds have carried me far today along the white, winding ox trail and I feel that I have earned these few minutes of leisure. Six villages is not a bad record when one remembers that there has been from an hour to an hour and a half spent in services at each stop.

In that first village, the baby had sore eyes. Let us hope the mother understood and will faithfully carry out the directions in regard to

My Chariot and Prancing White Steeds

the use of the boric acid which I gave her. And the heathen mother who brought the leper boy to be healed! How terrible it seemed! A leper at six years of age! How I hope she will take him to Moradabad to the leper asylum as I advised. There everything that is possible will be done to alleviate his suffering, and what a joy it was to tell her of One who did cure the lepers and who loves and cares for her poor stricken boy.

In one village, there was a battle royal with idolatry. Poor woman, how hard it was for her to give up her belief in the thing of mud and stone! How the light did shine in her face when at last the truth of a living Saviour did intrude itself into her consciousness! She will need much prayer to uphold her in her new-found faith, for it is not easy to escape a lifetime of heathen beliefs and practices.

Those were fine simple-minded Christians at Tatarpur and how that night-watchman did shout *Yisu Masih ki Jai* (Victory to Jesus). He

is a tither, by the way, which may account for the ring of victory in the shout. He has three children in our mission schools, one of whom will go out as a teacher this year.

And always and always as a background for all our meetings there were the crowds of Hindus and Mohammedans who form a curious semi-circle of onlookers behind our Christians, all gaping with wide-open eyes and mouth at the curious white person before them. Many of them had been profoundly moved at the story of redeeming love and had eagerly taken the tracts given them. Thus resting on His promise that His word shall not return unto Him void we are content.

The afterglow has faded and the stars shine forth brilliantly, undaunted by the silvery moonlight which seeks to eclipse their beams. A tiny path winds invitingly before my door, tiptoeing in and out among the flickering shadows. No one with a spice of imagination could resist such a tantalizing dare, and scarcely without volition on my part, I arise and follow its beckonings. This is March in the homeland! March with its slush, its wind and its mud! Well, there are compensations after all in being a missionary. This mild March night with the witchery of its moonlight is merely one of the "added things" which the kind Father delights to bestow upon his children. Who was it talked of being "buried" in India? Anyway, it's a mighty pleasant graveyard on a spring night and I lift my head that I may better feel the play of the soft wind on my face.

But by the sound of the wind rustling the tall reeds, I am brought back to the present with a start to find that my fairy path has led me into a dense jungle of tall grass which waves stiff and upright as high as my head on every side. With a curious shiver up and down my spine, I recall the stories of fierce she-wolves which lurk in these grassy jungles ready to pounce upon the first innocent traveller who passes their way after nightfall, and the words of the Indian preacher, spoken this very day, do not add to my comfort, "None but a very brave man would elect to pass through these jungles alone at night." As I happen to be neither a man or very brave I hurriedly retrace my steps. It would, no doubt, be a very romantic ending to a missionary career to be eaten by the wild beasts of the jungles, but

romance is another of those things to which distance lends enchantment, besides I have no intention of ending my career just yet. There are too many interesting things to be done first.

The camp fires send out a welcome gleam as I retread the twisting trail, and emboldened by the sight, I again slacken my pace. It was in such a night as this that Abraham walked forth under an Oriental sky and looking at these same myriads of flaming stars saw in a vision the great multitude of the faithful who in the years to come were to inherit the silent wastes about him, rivaling even the sparkling hosts in numbers, and with a thrill of the heart I recognize that the promise was not only to him but "to those who are afar off. As many as the Lord our God shall call." I too was an heir to the promise and claimed the covenant.

Typical Village Congregation
In foreground is mud stove on which they cook their food

It might not come in my time, but come it would when the faithful in India should be as the stars for multitude. A multitude that no man would be able to number. In that day it would be fine to know that I had had a part in bringing it about.

"As the stars for multitude," I quoted softly looking up at the silent glory flaming above me and in the hush that followed another promise dropped warm and glowing into my uplifted heart, "They that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."

HOW THE LITTLE BROWN WOMAN AND THE LITTLE SPECKLED HEN HELPED OUT IN THE MISSIONARY COLLECTION

THE pastor was taking up a collection, that is, he was supposed to be taking it. The clean white jarin (cloth) had been spread out on the bamboo bed and the invitation given to the people to bring forth their offerings "in the name of the Lord," but so far there had been no visible result from the appeal. The male part of the congregation (not counting the fringe of Hindu and Mohammedan on-lookers) which consisted of two men and a boy were inclined to be apologetic.

TAKING THE COLLECTION
The one with basket has just poured her offering of grain on the *jarin*

That is, the men were. They murmured some faint words about the hard times and the failure of the crops. "Perhaps the next time the pastor came around —" the boy squatted on his heels, his bright black eyes taking in everything. He was thinking — but who will attempt to say what a boy might not be thinking?

On the female side of the house, more interesting things were happening, as they sometimes

do. The younger woman had launched forth into a perfect torrent of explanation, exhonoration, extenuation and all the other ex's in the catalogue, in which she blamed the pastor, the missionary, the church, the government, and all the other powers that be, generally for the hardness of the times and the stress of circumstances, while all the time heavy silver anklets and bangles gleamed from ankles and wrists.

A little girl of about ten spent all her time in rescuing the baby from one predicament only to have him fall into another. Just at present that young hopeful was investigating the "Miss-Sahibs" shoe lace. He had a firm belief, like a certain historic kinswoman of his, that if he could only just taste it once all the mystery surrounding it would be cleared. But the way to his mouth seemed a long and dubious one fraught with many difficulties. Many a time he had almost succeeded only to have the shiny steel point slip from his grasp and his rising expectations dashed to the ground.

The little speckled hen had done her day's work and was now busily engaged in scratching in a dust pile to see if she could not unearth a stray bug for dinner. These folks seemed very tiresome with their endless talk and clatter. There was quite sure to be a fat worm over there among those leaves if those Mohammedan women would just move on and let her have a chance to find it.

The little brown woman sat very still with her *chaddar* pulled low over her face while she peered out from the folds with a troubled, anxious look. She had followed the service, oh! so eagerly. It was all so wonderful, this Christ about whom the missionary had told them. Now that she had seen it all in the pictures, she had understood it for the first time. She would never forget that last picture, the one of Jesus going to heaven in the clouds. How her heart had thrilled at the missionary's words: "He is alive. See, we do not worship a dead prophet, but a living God! Always he has promised to be with us. He is with us today, sitting in our hearts, if we are truly Christians."

A strange, glad joy fluttered in the little woman's heart. He was her God. She, too, was a Christian. But, oh, if she only had something to give him! The empty square of white seemed to

reproach her. He had given so much and she had nothing to give in return. The last handful of wheat had been ground, made into cakes and eaten not an hour before. In a little while she would go to the home of some of her high-caste neighbors and perform the scavenger tasks of the household. In return for this, they would give her the scraps from their well-filled larder and this would form the evening repast for herself and family.

The cheap glass bangles on her arms were worth only a few *pice* at the most. Nothing in the world did she own except her scanty household utensils and a little speckled hen. The vessels she must keep in order to feed her family. As for the little speckled hen —.

With a sudden triumphant sparkle in her eye, she got hurriedly to her feet, drew the *chaddar* yet lower over her face, and disappeared into the house. In a moment more, she was back in the doorway, but having come that far her courage failed her. She could never go out before all those people to put her offering on the *jarin.*

Munshi ji, munshi ji (respected teacher, respected teacher), she called in a timid voice, which was quite swallowed up in the strident tones of her sister-in-law. But the "Miss Sahiba" had been an interested spectator of all her movements, and quickly called the pastor's attention to the situation.

"Take the 'jarin' to her," she suggested, which the pastor was not slow to do.

The *chaddar* was pulled down completely over the face now. One wondered how she could see at all, and yet, see she did well enough, for as the pastor presented the clean square of cloth spread out and empty on his palms she dropped into the very middle of it — now what do you suppose? A nice fresh milk-white egg.

The little speckled hen paused in her scratchings, cocked her head on one side, and winked with one eye at the pastor, saying as plainly as ever she could in her hen language, "That's what I expected her to do with it all along."

The Miss Sahiba laid her hand tenderly on the shrouded head as she murmured something about the "widow's mite," and then because she was only a woman, even if she was a missionary, and women do silly things sometimes; she put up

her handkerchief and hurriedly dried her eyes as she turned away.

The little speckled hen, who had at last succeeded in unearthing the fat bug, shook her head in perplexity as she gobbled it down. She had given many eggs to many people in her lifetime but this was the first time any one had ever cried at receiving one.

But the little brown woman saw neither the tears of the one nor the head shakings of the other. Palm to her forehead, she was bent very low in the act of giving her parting *salaams* while over and over her glad heart was singing:

"Raja Yisu aya,
Mere dil men aya.
Mujh ko mukti dene keleye
Raja Yisu aya."

(King Jesus has come,
Into *my* heart he has come.
To give *me* salvation,
King Jesus has come.)

A Village Altar of Mud
On this chickens, goats and pigs are offered to the gods

HE was a lithe and handsome youngster, a Brahmin of Brahmins, as was evinced in every line of his proud, high-bred features. The white cloth that draped his limbs was of finest linen and this was set off to advantage by a dark blue velvet coat reaching to his knees. His closely cropped head with its long, silky sacred lock floating jauntily from the middle of the crown, was surmounted by a red cap richly ornamented in gold braid. The embroidered bag of books in his hand proclaimed him as just released from school while the bright black eyes, which seemed to take in everything at once in their glance, showed him ready for mischief or adventure.

The next actor in the little drama was a much more humble personage. He sat squatted on the ground, his back against the wheel of the oxcart, while he gave long, lazy pulls at a villainous smelling *haqqa* (water pipe). He had "honked" the oxen far over roads not easy to describe in polite language and he felt that he had justly earned his long deferred smoke. His long muscular arms and sinewy frame proclaimed him a true son of the soil. His body was partly covered by a little quilted jacket reaching just below his ribs while a strip of coarse cotton cloth wrapped around his loins and tucked up between his legs formed a rude kind of very loose pantaloons.

Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle, went the water in the pipe, while the man drew in long, deep draughts of contentment, and laid rosy plans for the marriage of his youngest son, now a promising young hopeful of four ripe years.

The boy rounded the corner with a youthful swagger, and then brought up straight like a mettlesome charger at the sight of the smoker and his queer-looking equipage.

It was an oxcart all right. If all other evidence was lacking, there were the two big white creatures as final proof of the matter. But such a queer looking oxcart had never landed in the village before, and he surveyed it with the light of a discoverer of new worlds shining in his eyes. The thick-padded schooner top, the cushioned seats, the yoke that swung on an iron pivot instead of being tied on with a rope, and, last of

all, the springs and the wheels with their iron rims.

He examined each and every part both separately and as a whole. To better aid in his scientific research, he climbed up on the step while the driver watched closely through half-shut eyes of amused tolerance. Once on the step, he discovered that two boxes were placed on each side of the cart, and like Pandora of old he could not resist the temptation to lift the lid. With a covert glance at the man, he gave one peep, then a prolonged stare at the greatness of his discovery.

The "Chauffeur" Who "Honked" the Oxen over Many Weary Miles

It was filled with books. Big books, little books, and middle-sized books! Never before had he beheld so many at one time. Without heeding the warning grunt of the man, he dragged out a handful of them to view. The first one was in English and he tossed it aside. The second was more to his liking, as it was in Urdu and he commenced slowly to read out the words.

"Ham se barhni na jai,
Masih tumhari mahima,"
(Oh, Jesus, of thy matchless glory,
I can never tell the story.)

"It's a poem," he cried excitedly.

The man beside him nodded wisely, although not able to read a word of it himself.

"It's a song," he answered, "and has a real pretty tune."

"But what are all these books for?" asked the boy.

"They belong to the Engrez log (English people)," replied the man. "They are very wise. They know all the books in the world and so the Miss Sahiba carries these with her and sells them to whoever wants one."

"How much does she get for them? Will she sell me one?" The boy tumbled out both questions in one breath while he fumbled to untie a little hoard of small coins bound up in one corner of his loin cloth. The man laughed good-naturedly.

"They are only a *pice* and I will sell you one myself. She will be glad to have me do it."

The *pice* was duly handed over and the great transaction was complete.

The boy now began to try to sing the songs but after a few tunings he gave up in despair. His tunes didn't seem to fit. "You teach me," he cried imperiously in the tone of one accustomed to being obeyed. But the man only grinned sheepishly and shook his head.

"My work is driving oxen, not singing songs," he declared, "but if you will go on down the next street you will find the Miss Sahiba under the pepul tree, and she will teach you all of them."

The boy needed no second bidding but started off on a run down the narrow, dirty street in quest of this new adventure. And now the curtain rises on the third actor in the scene.

He sat on a low mud wall, a little brown figure bowed with much bending over the loom. His little white cloth cap was in his hand showing a head closely cropped without the usual scalp-lock in the center. He was dressed in a battered pair of trousers much in need of repair and wore a little short jacket fastened only with one button at the top. His head was bowed low and he was slowly stumbling over the, to him, difficult words of the Lord's prayer, as they fell slowly and distinctly from the lips of the missionary. His wife and two children sat on the ground in front of him, while several "Chamar" women had halted in the background to view the strange proceedings.

"Forever and ever, Amen," repeated the missionary.

"Forever and ever, Amen," faltered the man, and then all raised their heads and he saw the boy standing beside him with the book in his hand.

The missionary might be compared to the stage manager in the play. She merely arranged the scenes for the others to do the acting. She also saw the boy and recognized the book in his hand.

"Can you read what is written?" she asked.

The boy, proud to show his ability, opened the book and began in the usual school-boy sing-song:

"Aya hai yisu aya hai, (King Jesus has come, King Jesus has come)."

His eloquence was interrupted by the voice of the weaver. In a high, nasal, not unmusical voice, he took up the refrain, "Aya hai Yisu aya hai."

"What comes next?" he asked delightedly, and the boy lined off another stanza which was quickly taken up by the self-appointed Orpheus.

"Do you know all the tunes?" asked the boy, and the weaver nodded happily.

"I never heard a song yet that I couldn't fit a tune to. The only difficulty," he added soberly, "is that I can't remember how the words come. Can you read all the songs?"

"All of them," declared the boy, emphatically.

"Well, then," said the weaver, enthusiastically, "I'll tell you what we'll do. You bring your book and sit out here while I stretch my threads ready for the loom. You can tell me the words and I will tell you the tunes."

They were too much engrossed over their own great plans to pay much attention to the parting "salaams" of the missionary but as she turned away a few lines from "The Sage of Concord" came into her mind and as she glanced back at the queerly assorted pair she murmured to herself,

"All are needed by each one.
Nothing is fair or good alone."

TELLING THE OLD, OLD STORY

IT was a typical village and a typical sweeper's home. A mud hut, a mud courtyard open on one side, a *charpai*[1] or two, a man seated lazily in the sunshine enjoying his noonday smoke, his wife busily engaged in *lepoing*[2] the walls of the house, and the old mother picking zoölogical specimens from the seams of a ragged *kurta*[3] — surely nothing more prosaic and uninspiring could be well imagined. Into this scene of domestic felicity, without preface or apology, walks the missionary and her humble helper, the Bible woman. As that missionary happened to be myself, I will ask the privilege of telling the story first hand, as it actually happened.

Behold us, then, seated on the *charpais*, our little congregation of Christians on the ground facing us. The usual *bhajan*[4] was sung, after which I began by asking some questions from the *Zaruri T'alim*[5]. Numbers one and two they answered to my entire satisfaction. When they came to number three, there was an embarrassing silence. "Who is Jesus Christ?" I asked; at which each looked beseechingly at the other for

TELLING THE OLD, OLD STORY

the answer. Finally, the old woman became the spokesman. "I don't know much about him," she answered, "I only know that he is the God I serve and I serve no one beside him." How is that for a confession of faith? "You don't know

[1]cot [2]plastering with cow dung [3]shirt
[4]hymn [5]a short catechism

about him," said the Bible woman, "and, for that reason, we have come to tell you. Just listen and you may learn the whole story."

A crowd of women of one of the higher castes, attracted by the singing, had drawn near and were standing outside the entrance on the courtyard. "Come and listen, also," invited the Bible woman, but they drew their skirts scornfully around them and muttered something about "*bhangi.*"[6]

Without preliminary, she commenced telling the old, old story while her little audience drank

Her Little Audience Drank in Every Word

in every word. It was all so new and wonderful to them! With upraised hands and many ejaculations, they heard the story of the angels' visit and of the lowly birth in the manger. Often the old mother would interrupt by exclaiming to her grandchild, "Listen! Hear every word!"

On went the Bible woman with the story of Jesus' life of service, of healing the sick, blessing the little ones, raising the dead. By this time, the non-Christians were as interested as the Christians and a deep silence ensued, broken only from time to time by ejaculations of amazement and astonishment. An old woman among the "gentiles" so far forgot her dignity and the sense of her surroundings as to actually sit down on the ground beside her sweeper neighbor. Her example was then followed by several children and finally by some of the other women until, before the end, sweeper and high-caste alike were seated side by side, listening with hungry hearts

to the story of One who went about doing good.

Deep were the exclamations of pity and woe, as the sufferings on Calvary were depicted. Tears coursed freely down the cheeks alike of Hindu and Christian. On went the Bible woman with her simple narrative, until she came to the grand climax when a triumphant Saviour broke the fetters of death and came forth alive and glorious from the tomb. The eyes and mouths of the listeners gaped wide in amazement and each turned to her neighbor to hear again the confirmation of the joyful news. "He came forth alive!" "From the tomb!" "Did you hear her tell that?" For a moment, the hubbub was so great that she was obliged to pause until order could be restored.

Even then, the end of the wonderful news had not been reached, for, in calmer tones, she sketched the story of the forty days and the triumphal Ascension, with the glorious promise, "Lo, I am with you always!"

While they were exclaiming over this, I put in my word. "What did Jesus promise?" I asked. "Did he not say that he would be with us always? Well, I want to add my witness that what he said is true. For he is with me all the time. He is in my heart, right now." I intended to add more but got no further, for the old sweeper woman was on her feet. With one hand she struck her breast in dramatic Oriental style, while she cried out in an estacy of joy, as she turned to her Hindu neighbors: "He is in my heart, too! He is in my heart, too!"

I felt that there was but one thing to say after such a true testimony. "*Yisu Masih ki jai! Yisu Masih ki jai!*" (Glory to Jesus) we all shouted, again and again, until the mud walls trembled with the joy of it.

Only a little mud-walled village and four illiterate Christians, a little group of heathen village women, a Bible woman who could barely read and write and a simple missionary who couldn't preach, if she tried, yet each would be willing to aver that it was the most wonderful meeting ever held.

As we made our way to the waiting ox-cart, amid cries and beseechings to come again and soon, the words of the Master seemed to fall on my ears with almost audible distinctness:

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."